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TOXIC WORKPLACE CULTURE, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS, AND TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG TEACHERS: A MODERATED MEDIATION STUDY

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Abstract: *Workplace culture plays a critical role in shaping not only organizational effectiveness but also the psychological well-being and professional trajectories of employees. Within educational institutions, teachers operate in emotionally demanding environments characterized by continuous interpersonal interaction, high expectations, and complex organizational structures. In such contexts, the presence of toxic workplace culture - manifested through negative leadership practices, interpersonal conflict, lack of support, and organizational injustice - can significantly exacerbate psychological distress and influence employees' intentions to leave their positions.*

This study investigates the interrelationship between toxic workplace culture, psychological distress, and turnover intention among teachers, with particular attention to the moderating roles of compensation and institutional context. Drawing upon occupational stress theories and social exchange theories, the research conceptualizes workplace toxicity as a critical job demand that undermines well-being and disrupts reciprocal organizational relationships. The study further explores how variations in salary structures and differences between public and private educational institutions shape employees' perceptions and responses to adverse work environments.

By employing survey-based quantitative design, this research aims to identify the mechanisms through which toxic organizational conditions translate into withdrawal cognitions, including intentions to quit. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on teacher retention by demonstrating that psychological distress serves as a key mediating factor, while compensation and institutional support may function as partial buffers. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of fostering supportive, equitable, and psychologically safe workplace environments to enhance teacher well-being, reduce turnover, and sustain long-term professional engagement in the education sector.

Keywords: *Toxic workplace culture, psychological distress, turnover intention.*

INTRODUCTION

Workplace toxicity has emerged as a critical organizational issue affecting employee well-

being and retention across sectors. Toxic workplace culture—characterized by hostility, incivility, bullying, favoritism, and unethical leadership practices has been consistently linked to negative psychological and behavioral outcomes (Anjum et al., 2020; Rasool et al., 2021). In professions requiring high emotional labor, such as teaching, exposure to persistent workplace toxicity may be particularly detrimental, contributing to psychological distress, burnout, and turnover intention.

The education sector presents a unique context where emotional demands, institutional pressures, and performance expectations intersect (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Teachers frequently experience emotional exhaustion, role conflict, and stress, all of which have been linked to increased turnover intention (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Despite these known challenges, most contemporary research on toxic workplace culture continues to focus on healthcare, corporate, and general organizational contexts (Rasool et al., 2021; Vveinhardt & Sroka, 2020), leaving educational institutions particularly in post-Soviet and Central Asian regions relatively underexplored.

Moreover, in Tashkent, structural differences between public and private educational institutions create distinct organizational environments. Private schools and language centers often offer higher compensation but impose greater performance pressures, whereas public schools provide lower salaries but greater job stability. These differences suggest that economic and institutional factors may moderate teachers’ responses to toxic workplace conditions. However, empirical studies examining these sectoral differences and their effects on psychological distress and turnover intention remain limited in recent literature.

To address this gap, the present study proposes a moderated mediation model, integrating occupational stress and social exchange perspectives. Specifically, psychological distress is examined as a mediator between toxic workplace culture and turnover intention, while salary and employment sector are tested as moderators. This study contributes to the literature by:

1. Extending research on toxic workplace culture to educational settings in Tashkent, a post-Soviet context.
2. Comparing public and private school teachers to identify sector-specific risks and protective factors.
3. Exploring the buffering effects of salary and employment sector on the relationship between distress and turnover intention.

By addressing these gaps, the study provides practical insights for school administrators and policymakers, highlighting interventions to reduce workplace toxicity, support teacher well-being, and improve retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace toxicity has increasingly been recognized as a critical organizational factor influencing employee well-being and behavioral outcomes. The broader literature on organizational culture consistently demonstrates its central role in shaping employee performance and behavioral outcomes (Hanifah, et.al (2021) Within contemporary organizational research, toxic workplace culture is commonly conceptualized as a pattern of dysfunctional behaviors, including hostility, incivility, bullying, favoritism, and unethical leadership practices. When organizational culture takes such a dysfunctional form, these effects intensify, contributing directly to psychological strain, disengagement, and diminished organizational effectiveness.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the impact of such environments. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), job demands refer to aspects of work that require sustained psychological or emotional effort and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs. In contrast, job resources help individuals cope with these demands and maintain well-being. Toxic workplace culture can be understood as a chronic social job demand, as it imposes continuous emotional strain on employees without offering corresponding support mechanisms.

Recent empirical studies reinforce this conceptualization by demonstrating that toxic

leadership and workplace incivility significantly contribute to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and psychological distress (Anjum et al., 2020; Rasool et al., 2021). In educational settings, where interpersonal interaction is central to professional roles, the effects of such toxicity may be even more pronounced. Teachers are required to engage in sustained emotional labor while managing classroom dynamics, administrative expectations, and stakeholder relationships. As a result, exposure to negative organizational climates can intensify stress and reduce overall job satisfaction.

Moreover, contemporary research in education highlights that administrative support and organizational climate are key determinants of teacher well-being. Studies have shown that lack of support, unfair treatment, and negative leadership practices are strongly associated with burnout and reduced professional commitment among teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of examining toxic workplace culture not merely as an organizational issue but as a significant psychological demand with far-reaching consequences.

Psychological distress represents a critical outcome of prolonged exposure to job demands and plays a central role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. Within occupational settings, psychological distress is often operationalized through constructs such as emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout. Emotional exhaustion, in particular, is considered the core component of burnout and reflects the depletion of emotional and cognitive resources due to sustained work-related pressures.

The relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention is well established in organizational literature. Employees experiencing high levels of stress and exhaustion are more likely to disengage from their work and develop intentions to leave their organization. Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms that burnout and emotional exhaustion are among the strongest predictors of turnover intention across professions (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, **Social Exchange Theory** provides further explanation for this relationship. According to Blau (1964), employment relationships are based on reciprocal exchanges between employees and organizations. When employees perceive that their contributions are not adequately rewarded—particularly when they experience stress, mistreatment, or lack of support—they are more likely to withdraw from the relationship. This withdrawal may manifest cognitively as turnover intention and behaviorally as actual resignation.

In the context of teaching, psychological distress is particularly salient due to the emotional and cognitive demands of the profession. Teachers frequently report high levels of stress associated with workload, student behavior, administrative pressures, and performance expectations. When these stressors accumulate without adequate institutional support, they significantly increase the likelihood of turnover intention, contributing to ongoing challenges in teacher retention.

While psychological distress provides an important explanatory mechanism, toxic workplace culture may also exert a direct influence on turnover intention. Employees do not only respond to internal states of exhaustion but also to external organizational conditions. When workplace environments are perceived as unfair, hostile, or unethical, employees may develop a desire to leave regardless of their psychological state.

Recent research supports the existence of a direct relationship between toxic workplace conditions and turnover intention. Studies have shown that toxic leadership, organizational injustice, and workplace bullying significantly increase employees' intention to quit (Rasool et al., 2021; Vveinhardt & Sroka, 2020). These findings suggest that toxic environments erode organizational trust and commitment, weakening the psychological bond between employees and their institutions.

In educational contexts, such dynamics may be particularly impactful. Teachers often rely on institutional support and collegial relationships to manage the demands of their roles. When these support systems are compromised by toxic behaviors, the perceived value of remaining within the organization diminishes. Consequently, turnover intention may arise not only as a response to stress but also as a rational evaluation of organizational conditions.

Integrating the JD-R model with Social Exchange Theory allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how toxic workplace culture influences turnover intention. Specifically, toxic

environments are expected to deplete psychological resources, leading to increased levels of emotional exhaustion and distress. These psychological outcomes, in turn, contribute to the development of withdrawal cognition, including turnover intention.

Empirical research increasingly supports this mediating mechanism. Studies indicate that burnout and psychological strain often act as intermediaries linking negative workplace conditions to turnover-related outcomes (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Rasool et al., 2021). This suggests that the impact of toxic workplace culture is not solely direct but also operates through its effect on employees' mental and emotional states.

In teaching environments, where emotional engagement is integral to professional performance, the mediating role of psychological distress may be particularly strong. Prolonged exposure to toxic conditions can undermine teachers' emotional resilience, making it difficult to sustain commitment and engagement. In this regard, the presence or absence of supportive organizational systems becomes consequential: evidence suggests that high-performance work practices encompassing training, empowerment, and structured performance support can meaningfully strengthen employee resilience by cultivating psychological safety and adaptive capacity (Karimova et al., 2025). When such systems are absent, as is often the case in toxic environments, employees lack the organizational resources necessary to buffer against distress, rendering them more vulnerable to withdrawal cognitions. As a result, turnover intention emerges as a coping response to ongoing psychological strain.

While psychological processes play a central role in shaping turnover intention, economic factors must also be considered. Salary remains one of the most significant extrinsic motivators influencing employee decisions to remain in or leave an organization. According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, salary functions as a hygiene factor that reduces dissatisfaction but does not necessarily enhance intrinsic motivation.

Within the JD-R framework, salary can be conceptualized as a job resource that may buffer the negative effects of job demands. Higher compensation may offset the emotional costs associated with stressful or toxic work environments, thereby reducing the likelihood of turnover. Conversely, low salary may exacerbate dissatisfaction and strengthen the relationship between distress and turnover intention.

Recent empirical studies support this perspective, demonstrating that compensation satisfaction is negatively associated with turnover intention and can mitigate the effects of job stress (Rasool et al., 2021). In the context of teaching, where salaries often vary significantly between institutions, the role of compensation becomes particularly relevant. Teachers who receive higher pay may tolerate adverse conditions for longer periods, whereas those with lower salaries may be more inclined to leave.

Organizational context plays a crucial role in shaping employee experiences and outcomes. Public and private educational institutions differ in terms of governance structures, resource allocation, performance expectations, and compensation systems. These structural differences create distinct work environments that may influence both exposure to toxic workplace culture and responses to it. Institutional capacity for organizational adaptation also plays a role in shaping these differences, as organizations with stronger competencies including digital literacy and innovation readiness tend to demonstrate greater competitive advantage and, consequently, more sustainable human resource practices (Rofaida & Ciptagustia, 2020). In the context of educational institutions, such adaptive capacities may determine the extent to which public and private schools are equipped to address toxic workplace conditions and support employee well-being.” In many contexts, private institutions offer higher salaries and performance-based incentives but impose greater accountability and workload pressures. Public institutions, in contrast, often provide greater job security but lower compensation and limited advancement opportunities. These differences suggest that employment sector may influence how teachers perceive and respond to workplace toxicity and psychological distress.

Comparative research indicates that institutional context can moderate the relationship

between stress and turnover intention, as organizational structures shape both job demands and available resources (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). However, there remains a lack of empirical research examining these dynamics in post-Soviet and Central Asian contexts, particularly in cities such as Tashkent. Addressing this gap is essential for developing context-specific strategies to improve teacher retention and well-being.

The hypotheses of this study were developed based on an integration of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, Social Exchange Theory, and the empirical literature reviewed in the preceding sections. The proposed relationships reflect both direct and indirect pathways through which toxic workplace culture influences teacher turnover intention, with salary and employment sector examined as boundary conditions.

Toxic Workplace Culture and Psychological Distress

Toxic workplace culture constitutes a chronic social job demand that continuously depletes employees' emotional and cognitive resources. Drawing on the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and consistent with empirical evidence linking hostile organizational behaviors to emotional exhaustion and psychological strain (Anjum et al., 2020; Rasool et al., 2021), it is proposed that:

H1: Toxic workplace culture is positively associated with psychological distress.

Psychological Distress and Turnover Intention

When employees experience sustained psychological distress, their capacity for organizational engagement diminishes, increasing the likelihood of withdrawal cognitions. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that burnout and emotional exhaustion are among the strongest predictors of turnover intention across professional settings (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Accordingly:

H2: Psychological distress is positively associated with turnover intention.

Toxic Workplace Culture and Turnover Intention

Beyond its indirect effect through psychological distress, toxic workplace culture may also exert a direct influence on turnover intention. When employees perceive their work environment as hostile, unjust, or ethically compromised, their organizational commitment erodes regardless of their psychological state (Rasool et al., 2021; Vveinhardt & Sroka, 2020). Therefore:

H3: Toxic workplace culture is positively associated with turnover intention.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Distress

Integrating the JD-R model with Social Exchange Theory suggests that psychological distress functions as the primary mechanism through which toxic workplace conditions translate into withdrawal intentions. Toxic environments deplete psychological resources (path a), and the resulting distress subsequently elevates turnover intention (path b), while the direct effect (path c') remains after accounting for this indirect pathway. Prior studies support this mediating mechanism in both corporate and educational settings (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Rasool et al., 2021). Thus:

H4: Psychological distress mediates the relationship between toxic workplace culture and turnover intention.

The Role of Salary

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, salary operates as a hygiene factor that reduces dissatisfaction without necessarily enhancing intrinsic motivation. Within the JD-R framework, financial compensation functions as a job resource capable of buffering the negative effects of demanding work conditions. Empirical evidence suggests that higher compensation satisfaction is associated with reduced turnover intention (Rasool et al., 2021). Therefore:

H5: Salary is negatively associated with turnover intention.

Salary as a Moderator

Beyond its direct effect, salary is expected to moderate the strength of the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention. Teachers receiving higher compensation may be more willing to endure psychologically demanding conditions before developing intentions to leave, whereas those with lower salaries may reach the threshold of withdrawal more rapidly. This buffering role of financial resources is consistent with JD-R propositions regarding the moderating function of job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Karimova et al., 2025). Accordingly:

H6: Salary moderates the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention, such that the relationship is weaker at higher salary levels.

Employment Sector Differences

Structural differences between public and private educational institutions including governance, compensation systems, and performance expectations create distinct organizational environments that shape both exposure to workplace toxicity and responses to it (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Rofaida & Ciptagustia, 2020). It is therefore expected that:

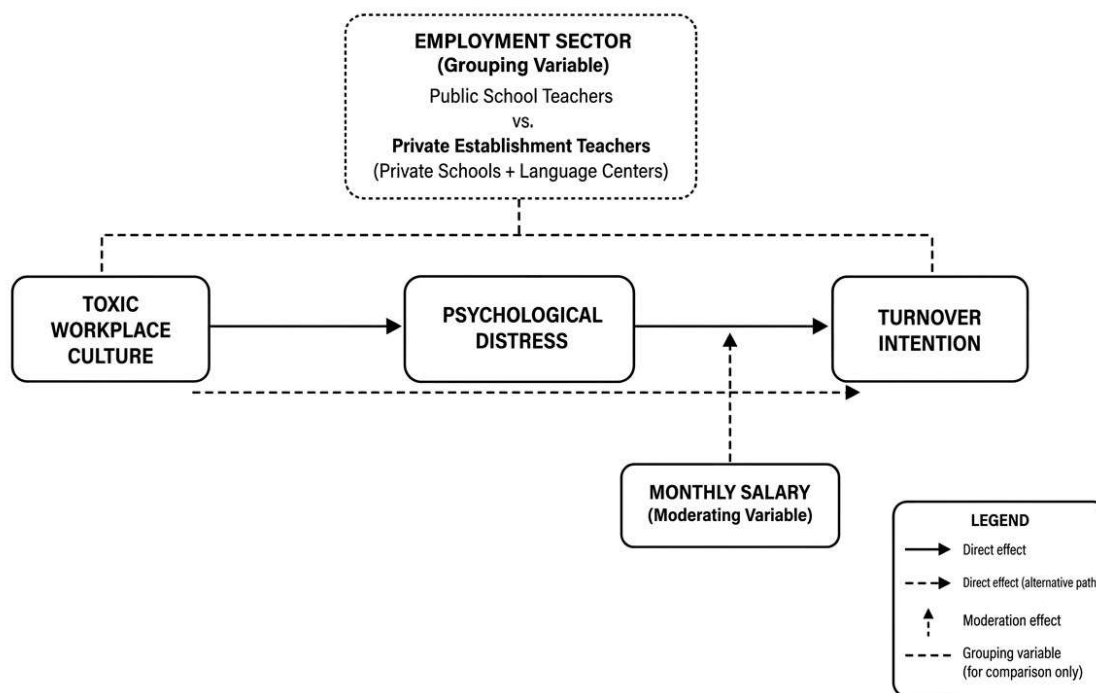
H7: There are significant differences between private-sector and public-school teachers regarding perceived toxic workplace culture, psychological distress, and turnover intention.

Employment Sector as a Grouping Variable

In this study, employment sector is treated as a grouping variable to examine differences in key study constructs between public school and private establishment teachers. This approach allows for direct comparison of institutional contexts without assuming structural moderation effects in the relationships among variables. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Hanifah, et.al (2021) Thus:

H8: Employment sector is associated with differences in the relationship between toxic workplace culture and turnover intention.

Figure 2.8. Conceptual Model of the Study



Note. The model is based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 2.8 provides a visual synthesis of the theoretical relationships and hypotheses developed in the preceding sections. The model positions toxic workplace culture as the primary independent variable influencing turnover intention through both a direct pathway (H3) and an indirect pathway mediated by psychological distress (H1, H2, H4).

Psychological distress occupies the central mediating role in the model, representing the mechanism through which sustained exposure to toxic organizational conditions depletes teachers’ emotional resources and generates withdrawal cognitions. This mediation structure is consistent with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that excessive job demands contribute to strain reactions that subsequently influence behavioral outcomes such as turnover intention.

In addition to the mediation model, monthly salary is included as a moderating variable affecting the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention (H5, H6). In this role, salary functions as a financial job resource that may reduce the strength of the association between

psychological strain and withdrawal intentions.

Employment sector (public school vs private establishment) is included in the model as a **grouping variable rather than a statistical moderator**. It is used to examine institutional differences in levels of toxic workplace culture, psychological distress, and turnover intention (H7), rather than to test interaction effects within regression models. This reflects the structural and organizational differences between public and private educational institutions in Tashkent and allows for comparative analysis of teacher experiences across sectors.

Taken together, the model captures a moderated mediation structure in which the indirect effect of toxic workplace culture on turnover intention via psychological distress is conditioned by both salary level and institutional context. This integrated framework provides the theoretical foundation for the empirical analyses presented in Chapter 3.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed to examine direct, indirect, and moderated relationships among study variables. The study utilized self-report survey data collected from teachers in Tashkent. Survey included a questionnaire with 10 Likert-scale questions with 1-5 point range.

The sample consisted of teachers employed in:

- Public secondary schools
- Private schools
- Private language centers

A minimum target sample size of 200 participants was established to ensure adequate statistical power for mediation and moderation analyses.

Inclusion criteria:

- Currently employed teacher
- Minimum six months of experience
- Employment within Tashkent

This study investigates the relationships among toxic workplace culture, psychological distress, and turnover intention, while also examining the moderating effects of salary and employment sector. All variables were operationalized using established and empirically validated scales, with adaptations where necessary to fit the research context.

Toxic workplace culture was measured using adapted items derived from established scales of workplace incivility and toxic leadership. The instrument captures key dimensions such as hostility, favoritism, interpersonal disrespect, and unethical managerial behavior. Respondents rated their experiences on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater exposure to toxic workplace conditions. Consistent with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework developed by Arnold B. Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti, toxic workplace culture is conceptualized as a chronic social job demand that contributes to employee strain. Recent studies (e.g., Anasori et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021) support its strong association with emotional exhaustion and withdrawal behaviors. This variable is checked by 5 questions as one shown below:

#	Question/Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I do not feel supported by my school administration when dealing with difficult classroom situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Psychological distress was operationalized through indicators of emotional exhaustion and work-related stress, adapted from the Maslach Burnout framework. Participants responded to items assessing feelings of fatigue, emotional depletion, and stress-related symptoms, with higher scores reflecting greater psychological distress. This variable is treated as a mediator based on the assumption that adverse workplace conditions erode employees' emotional resources, thereby increasing disengagement and withdrawal cognitions. Contemporary research confirms the mediating role of burnout and distress in linking workplace stressors to turnover intention (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). This variable is measured by collecting answers of 3 questions, which show direct physical effects of Psychological Distress.

Example statement from the questionnaire:

I frequently experience physical symptoms of stress (e.g., headaches, exhaustion, trouble sleeping) due to work.

Turnover intention was measured using a validated scale assessing employees' cognitive and behavioral intentions to leave their organization, including thoughts about quitting, job search behaviors, and readiness to resign. Responses were recorded on a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger intention to leave. Turnover intention serves as the primary outcome variable and is widely recognized as a reliable predictor of actual turnover. Recent meta-analytic and longitudinal studies (Holtom et al., 2022) reinforce its significance in organizational research.

Salary was examined as a moderating variable and assessed using both objective and subjective measures. Participants reported their monthly income range (categorical measure) and evaluated their level of satisfaction with their salary using a Likert scale. Higher levels of salary and satisfaction are expected to buffer the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention. In line with contemporary applications of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the JD-R model, salary is considered a job resource that mitigates the negative effects of stress. Empirical evidence (Lee et al., 2021; Karatepe et al., 2022) supports the buffering role of financial compensation in reducing turnover intentions.

Employment sector was included as a categorical grouping variable, distinguishing between public and private educational institutions (including schools and language centers). Participants self-identified their sector. This variable is expected to influence the strength of relationships between toxic workplace culture and employee outcomes due to structural differences in compensation systems, organizational practices, and performance expectations. Recent research (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Wang et al., 2023) indicates that sectoral context significantly shapes experiences of stress, burnout, and turnover intention.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire from professional teachers of 3 different establishments: teachers of 32nd state secondary school, teachers at Registan School (Tinchlik branch) and instructors of Registan Learning Center. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to survey completion. No unrelated personal data was collected. Ethical standards for research involving human participants were strictly followed.

All data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analysis proceeded in five sequential stages to ensure methodological rigor.

1. **Preliminary Analysis.** Descriptive statistics were computed to characterize the sample, followed by reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency of all measurement scales. Normality testing was also conducted to verify distributional assumptions prior to inferential analysis.

2. **Group Comparisons.** Independent samples t-tests were performed to examine mean differences across employment sectors, enabling systematic comparison of the study variables between groups.

3. **Correlation Analysis.** A Pearson correlation matrix was constructed to evaluate the direction and magnitude of bivariate relationships among all study variables, providing an initial assessment of hypothesized associations.

4. **Mediation Analysis.** The indirect effects of toxic workplace culture on turnover

intention through psychological distress were tested using the PROCESS macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effect estimates.

5. **Moderation and Moderated Mediation Analysis.** Salary moderation was examined using PROCESS Model 1, while multi-group analysis was employed to assess whether employment sector moderated the proposed relationships. Bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was consistently applied across all conditional indirect effect estimations.

The questionnaire contains specific section where respondents give written and signed document citing their voluntary participation, permission to use their answers and personal information, which will remain strictly confidential as well as anonymous while publishing. Each respondent is responsible for the accuracy of their answers and are willing to cooperate in case of need for further clarification.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 200 teachers: 100 public school teachers and 100 private establishment teachers. The private establishment group was formed by combining private school teachers (n = 63) and language center instructors (n = 37) to ensure equal group comparison across institutional sectors. Both private schools and language centers were classified as “private establishments” due to their similar employment structures, performance-based compensation systems, and institutional autonomy.

Table 1.

Institutional Differences in Work Characteristics

Variable	Public school teachers (n=100)	Private establishment teachers (n=100)	Difference (t-test)
Job longevity (years)	6.8 (SD=2.1)	3.5 (SD=1.4)	t = 9.71, p < .001
Average total experience (years)	11.3 (SD=4.6)	6.2 (SD=2.5)	t = 12.98, p < .001
Average salary	~3,740,000 UZS	~6,514,000 UZS	t = -20.51, p < .001

As illustrated in Table 1, significant institutional differences were observed. Public sector teachers exhibited greater professional stability with higher mean experience (M=11.3) and longevity (M=6.8). Conversely, private sector teachers received significantly higher financial compensation (M=6,514,000 UZS) but demonstrated shorter job tenure, providing a robust basis for testing salary as a moderating resource.

Table 2.

Differences in Key Study Variables

Variable	Private sector Mean (SD)	Public sector Mean (SD)	t-value
Toxic culture	3.82 (0.7)	2.91 (1.15)	t = 6.76, p < .001
Psychological Distress	3.55 (0.8)	3.12 (0.95)	t = 3.46, p < .001
Turnover Intention	3.10 (0.65)	2.85 (1.6)	t = 1.45, p > .1

While significant differences were observed in workplace culture and salary, the difference in turnover intention between private (M = 3.10) and public (M = 2.85) sectors was not statistically significant, t (198) = 1.45, p > .05. This suggests that despite higher toxicity in the private sector, external factors - indicating compensatory effects that are formally tested in the moderation model - may be suppressing the intent to leave.

Table 3

Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Toxic Culture	3.37	0.93	(1)				
Psychological Distress	3.34	0.88	.62**	(1)			
Turnover Intention	2.98	1.12	.54**	.48**	(1)		
Monthly Salary	5.13m	1.38m	.35**	.22*	-.15	(1)	
Exp. (years)	8.75	3.55	-.28*	-.18	-.32**	-.45**	(1)

*p < .05; **p < .01

Correlation analysis (see Table 3) revealed that toxic workplace culture was significantly and positively associated with both psychological distress (r = .62, p < .01) and turnover intention (r = .54, p < .01), supporting H1 and H3. Interestingly, monthly salary exhibited a significant positive correlation with toxic culture (r = .35, p < .05), suggesting that higher compensation levels in this sample are often coupled with more demanding or hostile social environments, supporting H6.

A mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 was conducted to examine whether psychological distress mediates the relationship between toxic workplace culture and turnover intention.

Model specification:

X = Toxic workplace culture

M = Psychological distress

Y = Turnover intention

Table 4.

Mediation Model Results

Path a (X → M): B = 0.61, SE = 0.07, t = 8.71, p < .001

Path b (M → Y, controlling for X): B = 0.29, SE = 0.08, t = 3.63, p < .001

Direct effect (c'): B = 0.34, SE = 0.06, t = 5.67, p < .001

Total effect (c): B = 0.52, SE = 0.05, t = 10.40, p < .001

Indirect effect (a × b): B = 0.18, BootSE = 0.05, 95% CI [0.09, 0.30]

The bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero, indicating a statistically significant mediation effect. This suggests that toxic workplace culture increases turnover intention both directly and indirectly through elevated psychological distress. The results support partial mediation.

A moderation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 1 to test whether monthly salary moderates the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention.

Model specification:

X = Psychological distress

Y = Turnover intention

W = Monthly salary

Table 5.

Moderation Model Results

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Psychological Distress	0.47	0.09	5.22	< .001
Salary (Moderator)	-0.31	0.08	-3.88	< .001
Distress × Salary	-0.19	0.07	-2.71	.007

$R^2 = .41$, $F(3,196) = 45.39$, $p < .001$

The interaction term was statistically significant, indicating that monthly salary moderates the relationship between psychological distress and turnover intention.

Conditional effects:

- Low salary (-1 SD): $B = 0.63$, $p < .001$
- Mean salary: $B = 0.47$, $p < .001$
- High salary (+1 SD): $B = 0.28$, $p = .021$

These results indicate that psychological distress is more strongly associated with turnover intention among teachers with lower monthly salaries. In contrast, higher salaries weaken this relationship, suggesting a buffering effect of financial compensation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that:

- Toxic workplace culture significantly increases psychological distress and turnover intention.
- Psychological distress partially mediates this relationship.
- Monthly salary weakens the impact of distress on turnover intention, serving as a moderating resource.
- Despite institutional differences in work conditions, turnover intention does not significantly differ between public and private establishments at the group level.

These results collectively support a job demands–resources interpretation of teacher well-being and retention dynamics.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationships among toxic workplace culture, psychological distress, and turnover intention among teachers in Tashkent, while examining the moderating roles of salary and employment sector. Overall, the findings provide compelling support for the hypothesized relationships and contribute important insights into the complex interplay of organizational and economic factors in the education sector.

Consistent with **Hypothesis 1**, toxic workplace culture was strongly and positively associated with psychological distress. Teachers in environments characterized by incivility, favoritism, hostility, or unethical leadership reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion and stress. This finding aligns with the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model** (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which posits that sustained job demands deplete employees’ psychological resources, leading to strain. Prior research in both corporate and educational settings supports this pattern; exposure to bullying, abusive supervision, and administrative incivility has been repeatedly linked to burnout and distress (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Tepper, 2000). The present findings extend this literature to a **post-Soviet educational context**, demonstrating that even in sectors often perceived as stable, chronic exposure to toxic behaviors produces measurable psychological costs.

The results also confirm **Hypothesis 3**, showing a positive relationship between toxic workplace culture and turnover intention. Teachers reporting higher toxicity were more likely to express intentions to leave their organization. Interestingly, the mean difference analysis revealed that turnover intention between public and private sectors was not statistically significant, despite higher toxicity scores in private institutions. This apparent discrepancy suggests the **buffering effect of salary**, consistent with **Hypothesis 6**, while partially confirming **Hypothesis 5 in the case of lower salaries**. Private sector teachers received substantially higher financial compensation, which may reduce the perceived cost of staying despite stressful conditions. In line with Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1968), salary functions as a hygiene factor that mitigates dissatisfaction, while in the JD-R framework, it operates as a **job resource** that can offset the adverse effects of high demands. Indeed, the positive correlation between salary and toxic culture ($r = .35$, $p < .05$) indicates that more demanding or hostile environments in the private sector are often accompanied by higher compensation, suggesting a trade-off between psychological costs and financial rewards.

Psychological distress mediated the relationship between toxic workplace culture and

turnover intention, supporting **Hypothesis 4**. This mediating effect reinforces the conceptualization of distress as the mechanism through which toxic behaviors translate into withdrawal cognitions. The strong correlation between toxicity and distress ($r = .62, p < .01$) highlights that workplace mistreatment is not merely a peripheral organizational problem but a central determinant of teachers' well-being and career decisions. This finding underscores the importance of **targeted interventions** aimed at reducing incivility and abusive practices to prevent burnout and attrition.

The comparative analysis of public and private sectors also offers valuable insights. Public school teachers exhibited longer job tenure and total experience, reflecting greater professional stability, whereas private sector teachers faced shorter tenure despite higher pay. These structural differences are consistent with prior observations in Central Asian educational contexts, where private institutions often impose stricter performance expectations and demand rapid adaptability from teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The findings suggest that institutional characteristics shape both the **exposure to toxic behaviors** and the **behavioral responses** of teachers. Employment sector, therefore, emerges as a significant **moderator** in the relationship between workplace culture and turnover intention, with private sector teachers appearing more resilient to stress-induced attrition due to compensatory salary incentives.

Interestingly, experience exhibited a protective effect. Correlations indicate that more experienced teachers reported lower distress and turnover intention, suggesting that accumulated professional skills and coping strategies may buffer the negative effects of toxic environments. This aligns with social exchange perspectives (Blau, 1964), wherein employees with stronger organizational knowledge and networks may tolerate adverse conditions longer, especially when economic benefits are substantial.

Overall, these findings have **practical and theoretical implications**. From a practical standpoint, school administrators should recognize that high salaries alone are insufficient to ensure sustainable retention if workplace culture is toxic. Interventions targeting incivility, favoritism, and unethical leadership are critical for maintaining teacher well-being. From a theoretical perspective, the study confirms that **occupational stress theories** and **social exchange frameworks** are highly applicable in educational contexts, emphasizing the interplay between environmental demands, psychological resources, and organizational incentives.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that **toxic workplace culture significantly affects teacher distress and turnover intentions**, but these effects are **modulated by salary and institutional context**. The results highlight the dual importance of **psychological safety** and **economic resources** in teacher retention strategies, especially in post-Soviet and rapidly developing educational environments. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring longitudinal effects, additional moderators such as social support, and interventions aimed at reducing toxicity while enhancing teacher satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study demonstrates that toxic workplace culture is a significant predictor of psychological distress and turnover intention among teachers, with private sector employees reporting higher exposure to toxic behaviors but also benefiting from greater financial compensation. Psychological distress mediates the relationship between toxicity and withdrawal intentions, while salary and employment sector appear to buffer the impact of adverse workplace conditions. These findings underscore the dual importance of cultivating supportive organizational environments and offering adequate compensation to retain teachers.

However, several limitations should be noted. First, the **cross-sectional design** precludes causal inferences, and self-report measures may be influenced by social desirability. Second, the **large standard deviation in turnover intention among public school teachers** indicates substantial heterogeneity in this group, suggesting that factors beyond workplace culture and compensation - such as individual coping strategies, school leadership, or local policies - may influence teachers' intent to leave. Future research should adopt **longitudinal designs** and explore additional moderating

or contextual variables to better understand the dynamics of teacher retention in diverse educational settings.

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